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## **Lincoln at Galesburg—A Sketch Written on the One Hundred and Seventh Anniversary of the Birthday of Abraham Lincoln**

BY JOSEPH F. EVANS.

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The autumn of 1858 was a period of intense political excitement throughout the State of Illinois. It was the chosen field of honor where Lincoln and Douglas, the great knights errant of debate on slavery, fought the last of many contests for mastery.

The immediate prize for victory was the election of a senator to succeed Stephen A. Douglas in the United States Senate, whose second term was about to expire; the ultimate reward was to be the result of the then coming national struggle for the control of the Federal Government.

The Republican State Convention of Illinois, had met at Springfield in June of that year and nominated Abraham Lincoln as their candidate for the United States Senate, the Democratic party having chosen Douglas to succeed himself. The issue was plain.

Senator Douglas, Chairman of the Committee on Territories in the United States Senate, had effected the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, which opened the territories of the Northwest, which had previously been dedicated to freedom, to the introduction of negro slaves to compete with free labor, while the territories were yet in a state of pupilage.

The discussion of the Douglas doctrine, then known as "Squatter Sovereignty," was the chief issue in the campaign, and had assumed the form of joint debates, which were being held in various parts of the State, beginning at Ottawa, and full accounts of which had been published in the Chicago and other papers.

The debate was to be held at Galesburg, on Saturday, October 7th. Being in that vicinity, I arrived early and had the good fortune of seeing and hearing these two great orators on that notable occasion. The wooden sidewalks of the city were already lined with people, and carriages and wagons, filled with men, women, and children, were driving about the streets in search of hitching places. On the outskirts of the town were many teams, and tents of farmers, who had come with their families and camped on the evening previous.

Galesburg was then a young city of several thousand population. It was a seat of learning, having two colleges, Knox and Lombard, and railroad connections in four directions, to Chicago, Peoria, Burlington and Quincy. It was a handsome place in the midst of a rich farming community, and originally founded by Doctor Gale, the head of a New England Colony.

The community about Galesburg was strongly Republican in politics, and was represented in Congress by the wonderful abolition orator, Owen Lovejoy.

It was whispered in those days that Galesburg was an underground railroad station for runaway slaves escaping from the border states to Canada, following the North Star in search of freedom. There is no doubt that on that day Mr. Lincoln felt he was among his personal as well as his political friends.

The debate took place on the campus of Knox College, where Eugene Field, author of "Little Boy Blue," was once a student. A temporary platform for the speakers had been erected against the east wall of the main college building, in front of which there was standing room for thousands of people.

It was a beautiful autumn day, the fields were brown, the corn was in the shock, and yellow pumpkins, still clinging to their withered vines, dotted the fields, waiting to be gathered into barns and sheds.

Being a student elsewhere, I made the acquaintance that morning of some of the local students, and learned from them some of the things I wished to know, that Senator Douglas

had arrived and was quartered at "The Bonny House," then the leading hotel, and was holding a reception in the parlor. I went to see him and shook hands with him and listened to his conversation for several minutes. I had never been in the immediate presence of a distinguished man before, although I had heard Governor Henry A. Wise and Sherrard Clemens, of Virginia, both great orators, speak at Morgantown.

The Senator was dressed in elegant attire, he had a pleasing manner, classic features, a fine head and shoulders, and altogether I was completely captured by his commanding appearance. As the ladies were presented to him, he had a happy way of receiving them, almost embracing them, which not only pleased them, but their parents and husbands as well.

Learning that Mr. Lincoln was about to arrive, I hurried to the depot to get a glimpse of him. As he stepped from the train in a long light colored duster, a high hat and hand bag, he was taken in hand by Mr. Sanderson, a lumber merchant, and driven in a plain open one-horse buggy to the latter's residence in the northern part of the city, and nothing more was seen of him until he appeared on the platform about one o'clock.

I managed to get standing room near the speakers' rostrum, and heard very distinctly every word uttered by both speakers during the entire debate, which lasted three hours. On the platform, which was a few feet above the heads of the audience, were a number of prominent people of both parties, among them Norman B. Judd, a member of the Chicago Bar, who was later honored by being the first person nominated to office by President Lincoln after the selection of his cabinet. He was appointed Minister to Prussia.

Senator Douglas, whose appearance was loudly greeted, made the opening speech. Before commencing, he was bowing and smiling to the audience in answer to their cheers. Lincoln, whose appearance stirred great enthusiasm, had taken his seat. The band played, and there was some delay and exchange of courtesies. I noticed that the Senator held a small round box in his hand, which evidently contained lozenges. From it he took one and then handed the box to Mr. Lincoln.

He then addressed himself to his speech for an hour in fine voice and manner, the subject being one with which he was very familiar, comprising in great part what had already been published of his speeches.

At times I was completely carried away with his masterful and fascinating manner. The platform was boarded at the sides, disguising the shortness of his stature and he appeared to great advantage, and the rising inflections and cadence of his voice probably impressed me more than the weight of his argument.

Although a youngster, I was well-grounded in my political convictions, having heard my father read to the family after the evening meal was over, night after night, the wonderful story of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," and of the wrongs of slavery, while my mother, sewing and listening, would smile, or tears would course down her rosy cheeks, as the story varied.

When Mr. Lincoln rose to reply, I was seized with a sudden feeling of alarm, lest he should be unable to fulfill the expectations of the vast audience before him that he would demolish the sophistries of his splendid antagonist. For the moment, Lincoln seemed to be too ungainly and awkward for such a grand and impressive occasion.

His opening sentences, however, were well expressed in simple language, his voice clear, his manner deliberate, and his words distinct. He did not fuss with his handkerchief, or hesitate, or reach for the water pitcher, or waste a moment's time, but simply talked right along for an hour and a half, without effort or display, and without manuscript or notes. His gray eyes became earnest and brilliant. He was a new man.

The first half hour of his reply was devoted to an exposure of a political fraud perpetrated on the people of the State of Illinois and upon himself by the publication in obscure papers of a set of abolition resolutions passed by a mythical convention, alleged to have been held in Springfield, a convention which never had any existence, but at which it was claimed that Mr. Lincoln was present and had knowledge of the proceedings.

He slowly unfolded the nature of the conspiracy, showing the alterations that had been made from time to time in the alleged resolutions to suit the local complexion in different sections of the State. He then openly charged Judge Douglas, as he called him, Congressman Harris, and the editor of the State Register, with deliberate falsehood and denounced their acts as a rank offense against the people on the part of these three persons, who call themselves honorable men. In that connection, Mr. Lincoln told the story of the "Eels" and the "Cuttle Fish," which caused prolonged laughter, and from that moment fixed his hold upon the audience.

He then passed to the graver questions involved, touching the spread of slavery, quoting the impressive words of Jefferson, the founder and teacher of the Democratic party, who had freed his slaves and his memorable words that he "trembled for his country when he remembered that God was just." He charged Judge Douglas with indifference as to the moral aspects of the slavery question, and declared that in his entire public career Douglas had emphasized nothing distinctive on the subject except that "he did not care whether slavery was voted up or voted down" in the territories.

Lincoln's closing remarks were in high thought, he had reached the conscience of his listeners.

Senator Douglas, who had a half hour in which to rejoin, failed to hold the audience which gradually broke away and scattered. He labored under great mental excitement, lost his temper and became violent, his grand manner was gone. He shook his fist in wrath as he walked the platform. A white foam gathered upon his lips, giving him a look of ferocity. He closed within his allotted half hour, a confused and disconcerted man. Mr. Lincoln had drawn the attention of the Senator to the false publication. Mr. Douglas replied that he would look into the matter upon his return to Springfield, probably after election day.

The revised editions of the printed debates give an imperfect idea of their effect upon the audience, as a speech which required an hour and a half in delivery cannot be compressed into five or ten minutes' reading. The flavor, spirit and humor

has vanished, and the skill of the orator to hold his audience does not appear on the printed page. A political speaker, who would undertake to hold the attention of an audience in the west fifty years ago by use of pure logic and reasoning would soon be deserted. His arguments must be interspersed with less weighty matter.

A great deal has been written and said about Lincoln's speech at Freeport, as the one on which the political fortunes of both Lincoln and Douglas turned, and there is little doubt that on that day, by his searching interrogatories propounded to Douglas, Lincoln broke, as on the wheel of fate, all the chances of the Senator to secure for himself the nomination in the coming national convention, the support of the Southern states; nor can it be doubted that of all the varied speeches of Lincoln in that campaign, the one which produced the greatest effect upon the audience was delivered at Galesburg.

At the State election, which followed, Mr. Lincoln received the popular vote of the State by a majority of more than five thousand, but on joint ballot in the legislature, Douglas had a majority of eight votes, which elected him to the Senate for the third time.

And two years later, on March 4th, 1861, Lincoln was inaugurated President of the United States, at a time when the clouds of Civil War were slowly gathering, and much solicitude felt for the personal safety of the president. Senator Douglas stood by his side, and his loyal hand held the hat of the president while he delivered his first inaugural address, from the eastern steps of the National Capitol. This historic address was a solemn plea for the Union.

The strangest of all human paradoxes is, that neither of these remarkable men inherited their political beliefs, nor were they favored by fortune in their youth; Lincoln, born of humble parents in Kentucky, a slave state, became the champion of freedom; Douglas, born in the northern state of Vermont, and bred to the worthy trade of a mechanic, became the ablest of all the advocates in the Senate of the right to introduce negro slaves into the free territories, a doctrine which finally came to issue and was settled on the field of battle;

that both of these great advocates were adopted citizens of the same state, at different periods resident of the same town, and personal friends from early manhood; both were nominees of their respective parties and ran against each other for the highest office in the gift of the nation, in the same campaign, the bitterest and most exciting political canvass in the history of American politics, and after "life's fitful fever," their lances at rest, both of these great champions now lie in monuments erected to their memories in the State of their love and adoption, and the places where they fought their mental tournaments and tested their strength and valor are held in precious memory as a part of the history and glory of the State of Illinois.

That Douglas knew his rival well is seen in his reply to his friends on the Sunday afternoon he was leaving Washington for Chicago to enter upon his canvass.

A number of senators, members of Congress and other public men had called at the Douglas home, on "I" Street, to pay their respects and wish him success in his campaign, when one of the visitors remarked to Douglas that he had noticed that a Black Republican lawyer, named Lincoln, had been selected as his opponent and he presumed the Senator would have an easy victory.

"Quite the contrary, gentlemen," said Douglas, "I assure you that I have the hardest struggle of my life before me. As you know, during my early twenty years in Congress, I have been constantly engaged in earnest discussions with all the public men of the day on all public questions, but I have never met the superior of Lincoln, as a skillful, persuasive, and powerful orator."

The world has returned its verdict on the barbarisms of slavery, which, a few years ago were defended even from the pulpit as of divine origin, and sanctioned by Holy Writ; It has also probably passed upon the relative merits of these giants in debate: That one was imperial, confident, aggressive and polished; the other deliberate, persuasive, simple and direct, but of the two, one was the greater. A brief sentence only from his opening speech at Springfield in June, 1858, is required to



show Lincoln's marvelous skill in presenting the issue in a crisp form that all could understand, "That a house divided against itself cannot stand."

The truth and beauty of these words, evidently a paraphrase of one of the parables in the Sermon on the Mount of "a foolish man who built his house upon the sand", were quickly caught by the listening ears of the anxious people.

Some six months later, Mr. Seward, in a speech at Buffalo, in October, 1858, in more ambitious language to improve upon Lincoln's definition, declared the issue to be an "irrepressible conflict." But this vague semi-philosophic expression did not possess the ring, and snap, nor rapid movement, to reach the hearts of the masses.

In a Senate speech afterwards, bidding for the nomination for President, Mr. Seward lost his last chance at the coming Convention at Chicago, when he forgot to mention his "irrepressible conflict" doctrine; forgot that slavery was a moral wrong; declared there was no North nor South; that all was peace, and that the spirit of John Brown's body was not marching onward, nor anywhere, except into a criminal's grave.

When the New York delegation arrived at Chicago in a special train with Mr. Thurlow Weed at its head, a very notable man, who had for years been the Warwick of his party in making governors and presidents, who never held an office, nor wanted one, his delegates decorated with silk hats, were quite imperious and quite ready to believe that nothing further was necessary than to confirm the nomination of Mr. Seward.

On the second ballot, however, Lincoln lacked only three and a half votes, and while the Convention was proceeding to take a third ballot, Judge Cartter, of Cleveland, asked permission to change four votes of the Ohio delegation from Chase to Lincoln. The Convention took the hint, a stampede followed, and the call of the states on the third ballot was never announced.

The result caused many wounds, which were slow in healing, and in Mr. Seward's case, his wound remained long an open sore, as shown by scraps of information scattered among the

writings of such eminent and accurate authors as Nicolay and Hay, Murat Halstead, Gideon Welles, Thurlow Weed and others.

In the campaign which followed Lincoln's nomination, Mr. Seward, who, it seems, had never met Lincoln, passed through Springfield on a stumping tour, but did not inform him of his approach, nor of his arrival, much less did he call when he arrived, but Lincoln, learning that Seward was on the train, hurried on foot to the station, entered the car and shook hands with the courtly Seward, who remained seated and did not rise during the brief interview, when Lincoln withdrew.

After the result of the election was known, Lincoln wrote to Seward tendering him the portfolio of the Department of State, which, after disclaiming his qualifications for the position, he accepted, but on the eve of the inauguration ceremonies, he withdrew his acceptance without explanation.

The President, to avoid a cabinet crisis before it had assembled, refused to receive Mr. Seward's declination, saying to a friend who was present, believed to be Gideon Welles: "We can't afford to let Brother Seward take the first trick."

The climax of assumption came while the Civil War was raging in all its fury, when Mr. Seward still laboring under the delusion that his party had made a grievous mistake in nominating Lincoln, and the people had made a greater one electing him, thought to correct the blunder by assuming the duties of the presidential office.

So he wrote a carefully prepared letter to the president, suggesting that he should violate his oath of office as president and permit him to assume its functions, while the president should "sit back" a little and "look on" and watch him administer his philosophic peace nostrums to a mobilized army of the enemy in actual battle.

The president replied the same day to Seward's proposition in his finest vein of epistolary writing, which sent his secretary back to his desk. The letters were filed away in the secret archives where they remained from view until both had departed from the tragic scenes of their lives.

The Muse of history has sung of Lincoln's love of justice and his greatness in all things, but we look in vain in the writings of Seward for any tribute to the excellence of that great man, his master.

In his deep and unavailing grief over the defeat and failure of his personal friend, Seward, to obtain the nomination at Chicago, Mr. Thurlow Weed shed bitter tears for the misfortunes of one whom he had long coached for the great office of his ambition. When the excitement of the hour had passed, Mr. Lincoln wrote to Thurlow Weed requesting him to visit him at his home, after which they became personal friends as well as political. Subsequently, Mr. Weed wrote to his paper, "The Albany Evening Journal," that his party had made no mistake in nominating Lincoln. During the progress of the war, the president appointed Mr. Weed as one of three special envoys to the Royal Courts and countries of Europe to discourage the recognition of the Southern Confederacy, the other two being Archbishop Hughes and Henry Ward Beecher.

Within the brief span of seven years from Mr. Lincoln's modest appearance at Galesburg, as the advocate of human rights, he was twice elected President of the United States and had led the country safely through the greatest Civil War in the history of the World. He liberated a race in bondage, and his name, beloved in every land, appeared in the bright galaxy of martyrs as one who believed in liberty for all mankind. Of him a master pen has written:

"That this man whose homely form you look upon,  
Was one of nature's masterful great men;  
Born with great arms that unfought victories won.  
Direct of speech, and cunning with a pen,  
Chosen for large designs, he had the art  
Of winning with his humor, and he went  
Straight to his mark, which was the human heart."